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ABSTRACT

There is no easy way to reduce the size of a college without destroying it. The author of this speech presents a prelude about Augustana College up to and including its 1969 budget crunch, then describes the procedures that Augustana has followed these past 4 years to solve these problems, and finally draws from its experience 9 propositions to help other administrators in the same situation. The conclusions and suggestions for small college management include: (1) Most colleges are not managed too well. (2) Morale is more important than money. (3) Size is not necessarily a sign of quality. (4) Faculty does not want to make hard decisions, but they do want serious input to those decisions that utimately affect their lives and careers. (5) There is nothing like a budget crunch to open up a college curriculum; there is also nothing like a budget crunch to make a faculty conservative. (6) It is very easy to get a negative syndrome going; it is not so easy to get it stopped. (Author/MJM)

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INHUMAN THINGS IN HUMAN WAYS

To those of us in college administration who have outlasted our allotted no score years and four, these are poignant times. With foreknowledge that after what colleagues in the English Department called my "translation" to the heaven of academic administration most of my energies eight years later would be going into trying to solve budget problems, I might very well still be teaching Victorian literature. Or perhaps not. Letters from jobless friends cross my desk and yours weekly. Eight years ago our major problem was where to find in August qualified teachers to put in front of freshman sections and how to jam 50 chairs into classrooms made for only 35. The business of the academic dean in those days was program development. "Come up with the new program," we said, "and the president or the board or the Federal government will come up with the money." These days the dean is judged not by programs but by how many successful grant proposals he can write or cause to be written, or how well he can maintain a student teacher ratio of 16 or 20 or 24 to one. If he can do these things without his better faculty finding homes elsewhere-- so much the better.

When this program was being put together, someone must have thought that an assembly of deans and presidents might this afternoon find some joy, some sorrow, perhaps some solace, a bit

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of gloating and perhaps a little help from an account of what we have been doing at Augustana College (the one in South Dakota) these past four years as we faced a deficit of some hundreds of thousands of dollars. I don't think our story is a unique one; many of you represent institutions which probably have been a lot more creative and successful than we in getting fiscal houses in order. But if our struggle, which began in the fall of 1969 and which hopefully will end this spring with the final set of faculty and staff cuts is instructive to even one of you, perhaps this afternoon will be worthwhile.

What I would like to do then is to tell you as prelude a little about Augustana College up to and including its 1969 budget crunch, then describe the procedures we have followed these past four years to solve these problems, and finally to draw from our experience nine propositions which you may find it well to test in your own situation.

Augustana College has deep ethnic roots as has its sister school in Rock Island, Illinois, where the Swedes prevail. Central to its mission has always been a commitment to the education of Norwegian Lutheran young people from the Upper Great Plains. With 1900 students it is the largest private college in a five state region. On the basis of objective entrance criteria, we have the most able student body in the state and, although my bias may be showing too keenly, one of the better undergraduate faculties I have known. Because the college has always been committed to regional service, we have let grow among the usual liberal arts majors other, more specialized,

William R. Mortensen

programs such as special education, nursing, social work, and criminal justice, all of which are designed for service to the Upper Great Plains. One can say that it is these specialized programs, along with a large department of music, that are the most costly to operate-- and, of course, when budget stringencies hit, it is programs like these upon which the professor of English or of history or of philosophy casts the most jaundiced, jealous eye.

A constant comment from those outside the college, and a sermon that I have been preaching in the five years I have been at Augustana, is that we are a better college than anyone suspects, better indeed than we ourselves realize. Our director of a major fund drive a few years back said that students ought to be beating down the doors to get in. I mention this not to boast of our right doing (although if an academic dean ever got tired of praising his school he probably should no longer be the dean) I mention it because I think one important thing we learned in our fiscal struggles is the necessity of a strong agreed upon image which the school projects. Too long we have been emulators, judging our qualities not so much by what we do with and for our students, but by how we measure up to the top dozen or so liberal arts colleges in the land. Thus library size, percentage to graduate school, number of PhD's on the faculty, student scores on GRE's, all those things Alexander Astin mentions in his recent The Invisible Colleges, these have been the sine qua non while what happens to students and what the college happens to be or really wants to be has not been much considered.

William R. Hutt

If we at Augustana did nothing more, our crisis led to the development of a flagpole statement of purpose by the administrative team of the college (the President and his four vice-presidents) a salutary thing when you stop to think about it. Right now we are a college whose top administrators agree on what the place is and what it should be doing.

Here then in the fall of 1969 was a college with 1900 bright, work oriented, culturally naive students mainly from the small towns and farms of the Upper Midwest; 140 faculty, 40% of them with PhD's; one of the fine college plants in its section of the country; 25 or so diverse and relevant academic programs; a student teacher ratio of 13-1 (although you couldn't tell that to the departments of English or history where classes frequently had 50 or more students in them); and all in all the reputation, even if localized, of being a preferred college. To date no one had cried deficit-- in 1969 for example we added four more instructors to the staff. Of course, the college had a history of budget problems. A poster from the World War I era hanging in the office of our Vice President for Development shows our Old Main and a caption: "Give! Help Jesus Save Augustana College." One of our presidents emeriti remembers sitting at his desk on a Friday evening praying about a fifty thousand dollar payroll due Monday and coming in to find a check for that amount on his desk. But in 1969 we were just emerging from that euphoric period when each year the student body increased, when in the heyday of the Great Society, little men sat behind green desks in the rabbit warren of HEW ready to ladle out money from the

buckets beside them, when the cement on one building project hardly had cured before another was begun.

Thus the shock to have to report to the Board of Regents at its 1969 fall meeting an apparent deficit of several hundreds of thousands in the current year's operation. Overbuilding, reluctance to raise tuition, a too low student teacher ratio, a too ambitious academic program for the size we were-- all of these had finally caught up with us. Our story then for the next three years was the struggle to solve these problems while attempting to keep faculty and student morale high and programs strong and viable.

In 1969-1970 we did very little. In retrospect none of us were equipped to face psychically the meaning of an educational establishment that was declining, not growing. For one thing, the bad budget news came too late to do much about it; our reporting systems have grown considerably more sophisticated since. Thus we didn't add any faculty for 1970-1971; but we didn't reduce any either. The Board of Regents, not being as hard-headed as many faculty like to picture boards, voted probably unwisely a modest salary increment in spite of another projected deficit. I did hear at the AAC meeting in Washington that winter an early version of Douglass' and Bowen's Cutting Instructional Costs. I duplicated the report for my department chairmen and urged them to try to effect at least some of the teaching economies recommended in that document. Not much happened, I confess, although some departments tried some things (television lectures in biology, for example, which while not a

complete debacle nevertheless because of technical problems weren't much of a success, mass sectioning and discussion groups in religion until some faculty questioned why the theologians had only two classes while the rest of the college had three). But most disruptive to plans for more effective operation-- and a real case where good news was really bad-- was what was happening with the incoming freshman class. In spite of every straw in the wind, in spite of the scramble for students in a region where the population is declining we began the 1970-1971 school year with a student body increased by 100. In fact Augustana College gained more new students that fall than the total South Dakota State system combined. So for the second year we tread water. The Board voted another raise, this time with the understanding that unless the budget got better for 1971-1972 there would be no further increments; it also raised tuition $300, and charged the administration with coming up with a balanced budget for 1971-1972, a student teacher ratio of 15 to one; and a long range fiscal plan for reducing the deficit.

When it became apparent in the spring that the next year's freshman class would be back to the level of the year before last and when the continuing bleak fiscal picture was reported to the faculty, things began to get rough. To quote Yeats, "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." Notice that absolutely nothing drastic had happened as yet-- the faculty had gotten raises for two years, the student teacher ratio was for most departments more than desirable and business was pretty

much as usual. We'd placed a moratorium on equipment purchases and asked for a 5% departmental budget cut. But the infection had started, and I was bombarded, mainly by department chairmen, with dire predictions, threats, and what have you that cutting off equipment was destroying programs, that asking one not to hire another part-time teacher was bowing to the forces of mediocrity, and most prevalent of all-- that all of our good young faculty would be leaving us. (As an aside none have as yet, two years later. I'm writing this in February, and by the time I deliver it in March I'll either reiterate this statement or eat it.) What all of this meant, and it would have been temptingly easy to dismiss it as a bad over reaction to a situation which though serious was by no means a crisis, was an inarticulate cry from faculty about being left out. It was their future that was at stake; the college was in essence theirs; they would be here long after the present crop of administrators had left. They felt that they had lost control over their own destinies, victims of institutional planning that had gone badly awry. Of course, they failed to note that in their drive for research oriented teaching, seminar groupings, a more and more diversified curriculum, they had added their own jot and tittle to that faulty planning.

To solve this problem, the President in the spring of 1971 asked the Augustana Faculty Personnel Committee and the four vice presidents of the college to form a task force charged with making recommendations to him as to possible ways to meet the Board's mandate of a balanced budget and a 15-1 student teacher

The agenda for those meetings was a quite simple one. First a thorough investigation with each of the vice presidents of his area of responsibility and then the construction of a "package deal" of recommendations to be sent to the President.

For the first time, at least in my tenure at Augustana, teaching faculty had the opportunity to quiz at considerable depth areas of administration and to raise real questions, and administrators had a counter opportunity to return the favor. So many things rankle when we are in even a mild crisis situation; it is so easy to make allegations about everyone else. Obviously we are doing all we can; it's the other area where the trouble is. One of the most difficult things my administrative colleagues had to learn-- that is those who had never experienced the mild paranoia about administrators that most faculty suffer from-- was that it is not enough to take on faith that everyone is doing the best job he can. We have to prove it.

I suspect if you listened, you would find questions being asked around your place too.

Yet the interesting thing was that as the committee put various people in the dock-- the development officer, the admissions director, the athletic director-- as they asked hard questions and got similarly hard answers a mutual, albeit grudging, admiration began to grow among the various constituencies which make up our college. As one of my vice presidential colleagues said to me at 1:00 A.M. on a below zero frosty Dakota morning as we went to get our cars, "If we do nothing else, at

least we're now talking. And that's worth the whole thing."

As to the components of the package of recommendations we sent to the President before Christmas-- they were really quite simple. First of all a one year moratorium on tenure; (in the long run this was the least crucial thing we did) and a moderate promotion list all requiring maximum standards of our personnel policy rather than the usual minimums. Then, a generous portion of leaves at half salary, none of whom would be replaced. We picked up here the equivalent of six teaching salaries even as we recognized that leave chickens would come home to roost a year down the road. Frankly it was a ploy to buy time and may not have been the wisest thing in the long run.

In the academic departments we realized another five and a half equivalent staff reductions mainly by not reappointing some faculty who had been considered leave replacements and by taking advantage of a couple of retirements. In total eleven departments, five in the Natural Science Division; five in the Humanities Division, and one in the Social Science Division were asked to have fewer equivalent staff this year than last. In addition the committee recommended no salary increment for 1972-1973.

On top of these faculty savings, we agreed to put on an alternate year basis classes with enrollments of fewer than ten, did away with most overload salaries, closed our electronic machines shop, and cut the athletic budget substantially. In the administrative areas, various readjustments totaled the equivalent of five fewer fairly top level people, although

these savings had in reality mostly taken place before the committee started work. It is difficult to convince faculty that at times administration is far ahead of them in fiscal stringency.

But the news from the committee was not all negative. Indeed there were strong recommendations for additional development office staff and more admissions counselors. In fact, we have opened two branch offices this year as college centers for student recruitment, fund raising, and alumni affairs-- one in the Twin Cities and one in Rapid City, South Dakota. All of these added up to substantial savings and did allow us to predict a balanced budget for this year, a prediction which because of a fairly larger freshman class has pretty much held true.

The spring months were spent looking at a 24 month staff plan, based on the projection of a further two year enrollment decline, as we stabilized our incoming freshmen classes. Two things were accomplished: a half dozen faculty in departments with low enrollments were sent letters in the spring warning them that they might not have a position in 1973-1974 (In point of fact only one of those has actually been released). But even more interesting, the committee realized that its decisions so far had been relatively easy ones-- last one in first one out, and so on. In at least one department what this meant was releasing a very fine young instructor who technically had been considered a leave replacement while keeping on the staff a much weaker but tenured man. It was interesting to watch a

faculty group wrestle with the problem. The outcome was a charge from the committee to the academic dean to warn four tenured faculty in the college that in the judgment of their peers they were not living up to the effectiveness expected of Augustana faculty and that unless dramatic improvement were shown by the spring of 1973, they would be released from the staff. Department and division chairmen and I have been working with these four this year, counseling, visiting classes, interviewing students, and so on. While it appears now that only one of the four will actually be released (one resigned last summer), there has been marked improvement in the work of the others.

This academic year has by and large been a replay of last, although the expanded mandate of the committee has somewhat expired. Nine additional departments will have one less equivalent staff for 1973-1974, although these savings will be realized by the release of only one teaching faculty member. Four people are retiring this spring, and three have resigned. None are being replaced. On the basis of a balanced budget with a small surplus for next year, the Board of Regents has authorized a small guaranteed salary increment with the understanding that if the situation in the fall warrants it, an additional increment will be granted. Thus, the admissions office has been challenged to bring in more students; the development office has been challenged to raise more money for the annual fund, and the faculty has been challenged to help better the attrition rate (a rate while still small did worsen last year). With total community effort, we feel, much can be done.

Whether we will have been successful in cutting our staff without serious damage to the academic program can only be determined this next spring. Because even though our recruiting is successful, running completely opposite to the situation in neighboring schools, we know that for 1974-1975 we will bottom out at a lower student body than we now have. We also know that we have to plan for this. Thus our work this spring will be to identify another half dozen faculty, some will be tenured this time, for possible release two years from now. In all honesty these half dozen may destroy the community fabric we have been able to maintain so far. Many faculty are convinced that to go much deeper will be to sap the quality of our programs. The trick will be to arrive at these last hard bitings of the bullet as objectively as we can in terms of hard numerical data, of our agreement as to the kind of college we are, ultimately in terms of what will be best for the long range interests of our students. Some programs may have to go; some redefinitions of what we mean by liberal arts may have to be made. The Director of Institutional Research has done all he can in terms of hard data-- I can only live by optimistic faith that we can pull off this final round and get back into the sun after our long long Scandinavian night.

What have we learned these past years that might be of some help to others? Let me here at the end sketch briefly nine propositions for your consideration. Note that they are from the viewpoint of an academic dean-- a president, a faculty member, a student might see things a bit differently.

1. Most colleges are not managed too well. We got in our present situation through inadequate long range planning and handling of scarce resources. The crunch has shown us that to survive we have to do better. At Augustana we have been fortunate to have first participated in the Danforth Foundation's Institute for College Development and in the fact that the Board of College Education of the American Lutheran Church put together a management audit team which has been quite helpful. Thus we are developing a more adequate data base, can play institutional games on our computer, have involved the whole community in long and short range planning, and are moving rapidly toward the development of a top level management team in all that the word implies.

2. Morale is more important than money. Sometimes Boards and the more hard-headed among us college administrators have to be shown that the most businesslike thing to do may not be best in the long run. Thus the decision of the Augustana Board three years ago to grant a sizable raise in the face of a deficit. Had they not, the cost in faculty morale might have been disastrous.

3. Comparisons are odious. The best way to get a fruitless but debilitating faculty fight going is to compare such things as faculty student ratio either inter or intra college. Equally fruitless is to compare the growth of staff equivalencies. For example, a study at our place showed that since 1967, the last time we had the size student body we now have the faculty had grown by 21 people, the administration by one. Which brought

about the unanswerable retort from the faculty, "But we started at a much lower base." In turn we made a bad mistake trying to achieve our faculty cuts on the basis of a Board mandate to reach a 15 to one student teacher ratio. You can't believe the number of hours of calculation and recalculation that charge brought about. Much better would be to announce a percentage budget cut, allowing some options.

4. Size is not necessarily a sign of quality. Possibly the most difficult mind set to whip these days is that which says the bigger the library holdings, the more extensive the campus, the more varied the academic programs, the larger the faculty (obviously all with PhD's), the better your college is. The larger we grew these past decades, the more diversified even the smallest among us became. The problem is to back away from diversity to more generalized programs without hurting the education we give our students.

5. A somewhat corollary proposition to the last is this: Counting is not everything; but it is more important than we have thought. Most of us older academic types have been suspicious for a long time about the drift toward quantification in our society, particularly when it came to counting human traits and institutions like colleges. But in our suspicion we let drift a situation where a look at demographic tables, or PhD production figures, or manpower projections would have let us adjust without almost destroying the lot of us.

6. Faculty really don't want to make hard decisions; but they do want serious input to those which ultimately affect

their lives and careers. At Augustana the dean and president have occasionally turned down a recommendation from the Personnel Committee without damaging communication and mutual trust. But when it comes to making difficult decisions about whom to separate from the college, the tendency on the part of the faculty is to play it more and more "humanely" to think of individuals more than the institution. Thus a suggestion that low salaries are caused by too many faculty eating up the salary budget, means that a raise gained by releasing faculty is "blood money." I have had chairmen say to me, "I refuse to decide. If someone has to go, you choose." On the other hand, a unilateral decision without some input from that chairman would be disastrous.

7. There is nothing like a budget crunch to open up a college curriculum; there is nothing like a budget crunch to make faculty conservative. While these two propositions seem contradictory, in essence they are not. While it is true that a lack of funds may inhibit the development of experimental programs because they "cost money," we have seen another movement in our faculty-- a willingness to seek creative ways to put together programs out of the ones already existing, a use of independent study and intern education as ways to make our offerings more exciting, even though faculty receive no additional remuneration for these efforts. What has happened is the faculty is seeking curriculum reform within the bounds of our own resources. Thus when an interdisciplinary group got together last fall to discuss creation of a major in early child-

hood, their first decision was, "Let's see what we can do without going after grant money."

8. Whether to perform radical surgery at once, or let the condition draw to a slow cure is moot. At Augustana we have taken four years to solve our budget problems, and I suspect some have felt we took entirely too long. The question to be answered is whether the certainty gained by immediate radical moves is worth the possible serious disruption to the programs of the college and to the students in those programs. No matter what you do the worst construction on the situation will be the one the general public will see. It amazed me this fall to find that the announcement of a state school near us that they were cutting 38 faculty for next fall soon became in the rumor mill, a statement that we were too.

9. And that leads to the last proposition: It is very easy to get a negative syndrome going; it is not so easy to get it stopped. Faculty, never traditionally a very secure group, also tend to put the worst rather than the best construction on things. Perhaps it is the leadership of the college which must be responsible for creating an atmosphere of hope, a possibility for miracles-- in spite of the budget projections. It is sad when faculty give up on a college, and stay because there is no other place to go. It is sadder, and I know a place or two where this has happened, when the students have given up. Who is to return us to a sense of our real mission if not those of us who are in this room? As Pogo says, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

I began this paper with a title "Inhuman Things in Human Ways" because it has seemed to me that this is what we who are responsible at the top for higher education in this country have had to do these past few years. There is no easy way to reduce the size of a college without destroying it. There is no easy way to face dismissing a man when you know that you may be saying to him, "You no longer have a profession." There is no easy way to keep the trust we have to offer young people the means for the highest level of education we can conceive of. If I ever get over having sleepless nights because of some of the decisions about people I have had to make these past years, then I'll think twice about staying in the role I'm in. My only hope for myself and for you is that our decisions will ultimately be for the good of the students we serve.